CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Section (A) discusses Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) as a framework for teaching reading, emphasizing collaborative strategies like scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to enhance cognitive and linguistic development. Section (B) highlights principles and strategies for teaching reading to elementary students, focusing on interactive, contextually relevant approaches that address challenges such as diverse reading levels and limited resources. Together, these sections provide a theoretical basis for understanding effective reading instruction for young learners.

A. Sociocultural Theory in English Language Teaching

Modern language teaching has been greatly impacted by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT), especially its focus on social interaction and cultural context in second language (L2) acquisition. SCT states that mediated interactions in a social setting, particularly within a learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), are the means by which cognitive growth takes place (Chaiklin, 2003). By placing a strong emphasis on interactive and collaborative methods, these concepts have revolutionized conventional perspectives on language acquisition.

SCT presents a number of connected ideas that together influence how it is used in language learning. The core concept in SCT, the ZPD, introduced by Vygotsky (1978) as cited in Arshad and Chen (2009) describes two stages of learning. The first stage, also known as the actual developmental level, is when the learner is able to solve problems on their own. The second stage is known as the potential development level, or ZPD. It consists of tasks that are too difficult to do on your own but that you can accomplish with the help of a teacher or a more experienced peer. With this support, students are able to go beyond their existing capabilities. For instance, students might internalize new ideas through social engagement when they participate in guided activities where they collaborate to solve problems or discuss ideas (Alkhudiry, 2022). This paradigm moves the emphasis of language learning from an autonomous process to a learner-centered

approach, in which scaffolding, communication, and teamwork are essential (Panhwar et al., 2016).

The ZPD is closely related to scaffolding, which is the term for the short-term assistance that peers or teachers provide students to complete activities that they are still unable to do on their own (Arshad & Chen, 2009b). Reading comprehension scaffolding techniques include summarizing texts, employing visual organizers to draw attention to important concepts, and asking guiding questions. One example of scaffolding is a teacher leading students through a story during a reading activity. The teacher may begin by introducing the book and talking about the title and cover to get students interested. The teacher can take a moment during the story's reading to quiz the class on the plot and characters, allowing them to make predictions about what could happen next. The teacher may also give examples and explanations while modeling how to recognize important terminology or topics in the text. After reading, the teacher can lead a conversation in which they urge students to express their feelings and ideas about the narrative, allowing them to relate to the content on a personal level. Students' reading confidence and comprehension abilities are increased with this step-by-step assistance (Arshad & Chen, 2009).

Building on this foundation, semiotic mediation is another fundamental concept of SCT. It explains how learning is facilitated through signs and symbols, particularly language, which serves as a bridge between social interaction and individual understanding. Adults use tools like spoken words, gestures, and diagrams to make complex ideas accessible to learners (Arshad & Chen, 2009). For elementary teachers, this highlights the importance of using clear, relatable language and visual aids when explaining reading strategies (McCuaig, 2023). For instance, demonstrating the link between a story's main idea and its supporting details enables students to process and internalize comprehension strategies. Semiotic mediation thus lays the groundwork for deeper learning processes, connecting external interaction with individual cognition.

As learners engage with semiotic tools, they begin the process of appropriation, which involves adopting these tools to interpret their environment

and tasks. In the study by Arshad & Chen (2009), in reading, this might involve acquiring new vocabulary or sentence structures by observing teachers' examples or peers. Teachers can support appropriation through think-aloud strategies during reading sessions, demonstrating how to decode unfamiliar words or infer meaning from context (Arshad & Chen, 2009). Over time, students take ownership of these skills, transitioning from dependent learners to independent problem solvers. Appropriation highlights the role of guided modeling in empowering students to internalize effective comprehension strategies.

Appropriation leads naturally to internalization, where external interactions and guidance are transformed into internal mental processes. This might entail transforming spoken instructions from a teacher into independent mental processes that lead a student's reading (Arshad & Chen, 2009). Through guided reading exercises, teachers may help students internalize, progressively lowering support as they gain confidence (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). For instance, a teacher may first assist students in determining the theme of a story before letting them practice on their own.

ZPD, scaffolding, semiotic mediation, appropriation, and internalization are interrelated ideas that influence numerous pedagogical approaches in English language teaching (ELT). Through collaborative, real-world activities that allow students to practice language skills in relevant circumstances, SCT-inspired teaching methods empower students to take charge of their education (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, referenced in (van Compernolle & Williams, 2013). For instance, students could debate a text and summarize its key points in small groups as part of a reading exercise. Students can exchange ideas and gain knowledge from one another through this participatory approach, which promotes deeper comprehension (Ameri, 2020 Fahim & Haghani, 2012). SCT exercises provide a practical grasp of the language by emphasizing not just memory but also critical thinking and problem-solving.

Lastly, by emphasizing learner autonomy, SCT turns students from passive recipients of education into active contributors. This is consistent with constructivist concepts, which hold that students learn by interacting with others

and their environment (Lu, 2022; Panhwar et al., 2016; Poehner & Lu, 2024). In their educational journey, students gain a feeling of agency and responsibility via self-reflection, group problem-solving, and discussion participation. Academic and personal development depend on the development of lifetime skills like independence and critical thinking, which are fostered by this learner-centered approach.

The Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky, in summary, provides a thorough framework for comprehending and promoting language and cognitive development. Through the concept of ZPD, SCT explains that students can reach higher levels of understanding when they get help from teachers or more competent peers. Therefore, the use of this theory helped the researcher to examine how teachers' strategies-such as giving hints, using multimodal media, and guiding discussions-contribute to students' reading comprehension development.

B. Teaching Reading in Elementary Level

Teaching reading at the elementary school level has been experienced in a variety of settings. A study by Smith et al., (2023) stated teachers often find that using lively and stimulating materials can greatly enhance students engagement and foster a positive learning environment. Teachers have noted, for example, that allowing students to choose books based on their interests fosters a true love of reading and enhances comprehension abilities. Teachers who use well-selected complicated texts in whole-class education also frequently remark that their students work together more cohesively and feel more accomplished as they go through difficult content. This harmony between content-focused and student-centered methods enables teachers to modify their methods in response to the requirements and preferences of students, resulting in an engaging and fulfilling educational experience that emphasizes the importance of reading comprehension abilities in student (Smith et al., 2023).

As said in the previous paragraph, teaching reading has been demonstrated to motivate and excite students, but it also comes with difficulties that teachers must face. According to studies conducted by Pathomchaiwat & Thongrin, (2024) and

Lu, (2022) there are two main reasons why teaching reading skills successfully might be difficult for teachers. First, a large number of teachers are undertrained in teaching reading, which restricts their ability to teach important abilities like comprehension, summarization, and strategic reading. This knowledge gap often undermines teachers' confidence, especially in diverse classrooms where students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ significantly from the reading materials. Secondly, insufficient reading materials that connect to students' real-life contexts can hinder engagement and comprehension (Lu, 2022). When the content is not meaningful to them, students find it harder to understand and connect with the text, forcing teachers to find creative ways to make lessons more relevant and engaging (Lu, 2022).

To teach reading to young learners, there are two important things to consider. First, the principles of teaching reading, and second, the principles of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), which are summarized in the following table.

Table 2. 1 Principles of Teaching Reading and TEYL

Principles of Teaching Reading (R. Williams, 1986)	Principles of Teaching English to Young Learners (M. Williams, 1998)
1) Interesting texts are essential	1) Age appropriateness
2) Focus on reading during lessons	2) Learning Through Play
3) Language development supports reading ability	3) Integrating language with content
4) Classroom activities should reflect real reading	4) Physical activity
5) Teachers should be less dominant	5) Building prior knowledge
6) Exercise types should reflect cognitive reality	6) Repetition and routine

7) Extensive reading is necessary	7) Interaction
8) Reading involves contribution from the reader	8) Use of stories and songs
9) Reading requires listening skills too	9) Encouraging activity
10) Using text does not equal teaching reading	10) Teacher enthusiasm

These principles align with young learners' unique characteristics, as outlined Scott & Ytreberg (1993)

1) Young learners recognize that the world operates according to rules. While they may not fully comprehend these rules, they understand that rules must be followed, which provides them with a sense of security.

2) They tend to grasp the meaning of situations faster than they can comprehend the language being used.

3) They begin using language skills intuitively, often before they realize they are doing so.

4) Their understanding of the world is primarily developed through sensory experiences involving touch, sight, and hearing.

5) Young learners are highly logical; they interpret instructions in the order they are given.

6) Their attention span and ability to concentrate are quite limited.

7) Young learners often struggle to fully grasp the meaning of what adults say.

8) They are unable to independently determine what they should learn.

9) Play is an essential and enjoyable part of their daily activities.

10) They generally approach learning with enthusiasm and a positive attitude.

Based on the characteristics mentioned above, it is evident that young language learners, particularly elementary school students, have the ability to grasp abstract concepts, recognize and interpret symbols (starting with words), make generalizations, and organize information systematically.

To address these challenges, study by Rehman et al. (2020) propose a structured approach involving three stages of reading instruction: the first one is pre-reading. In the pre-reading stage, teachers guide students to anticipate and understand the key ideas of the text. This stage helps students activate and build on their prior knowledge, setting a foundation for comprehension. Key strategies include previewing the text, guessing meanings, using prior knowledge, skimming, scanning, and making predictions.

The next stage is while reading, an essential approach to improving reading is teaching while-reading strategies. These include focusing on text structure, guessing the meaning of unknown words, and choosing strategies based on the context. Students should learn not only to apply various strategies but also to identify when and how to use them effectively. This helps students engage more deeply with texts, extract key information, and meet learning objectives. While-reading strategies fall into two main categories: 1) cognitive strategies and 2) metacognitive strategies.

Teachers also employ post-reading strategies as a reading technique. These assist students with putting the text's lessons into practice and making connections between them and other language abilities like speaking, writing, and listening. This method helps students meet learning goals by identifying important material and applying it to other assignments or lessons. Examples include creating visual representations, consulting related sources, paraphrasing, and critically analyzing the text.

There is still a lack of research on how these strategies are applied in actual classrooms, especially at the elementary level, where diverse learning needs and limited resources often overlap. While many studies focus on theoretical models and general approaches, fewer examine the specific, practical methods teachers use to address everyday challenges in teaching reading. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the real-world strategies teachers use to enhance reading comprehension, offering practical insights for educators and meaningful benefits for students' literacy growth.